
Shelley McGuire
School of Biological Sciences, Washington State University, Pullman, WA

Background
Participating in adequate levels of rigorous physical activity is one of the most important things a person can do to stay healthy and to live a long and productive life. Consequently, in 2008, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, which put forth prudent recommendations for physical activity across the life span. In brief, this publication recommends that adults participate in at least 2.5 h of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week in addition to at least 2 bouts of muscle-strengthening activities. Children and teens are encouraged to partake in at least 1 h of physical activity daily. To track the nation’s collective (and statewide) progress in meeting these goals as well as to determine the presence of environmental and policy strategies to help in their attainment, the CDC has more recently published the State Indicator on Physical Activity, 2014. This report also describes 3 “Stories from the Field” highlighting efforts by state or local health agencies to increase physical activity among its residents. This publication—the first of its kind since 2010—is summarized here.

Indicators and Sources of Data
Indicators of physical activity and health-related objectives included in this report are based on and consistent with recommendations put forth in the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans and Healthy People, 2020. Nine are behavioral indicators, and 8 are related to physical activity–related policies and environments. In all, the report used data from the CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, and the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. Behavioral indicators were specified separately for youth and adults. It is noteworthy that, in 2011, the CDC made changes to its Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. As a result, estimates of physical activity from these sources and used in this 2014 report should not be compared with estimates obtained before 2011.

Highlighted Results
In general, this report shows relatively large variation in physical activity levels among the states, but that many states do indeed have environmental and policy strategies in place that encourage physical activity. Selected, more detailed results are provided here.

- **Leisure-time activity**: Overall, 75% and 85% of U.S. adults and children, respectively, report engaging in some type of leisure-time activity, such as running, calisthenics, golf, gardening, or walking for exercise. Mississippi ranked lowest, with 36% and 23% of adults and children surveyed, respectively, reporting no leisure-time activities of this sort.

- **Minimum recommended aerobic activity**: Adults fared better than children in terms of meeting the minimum recommended levels of aerobic activity: 52% and 15%, respectively. For children, Oklahoma fared best in this regard with 39% reporting 1 h of activity each day; Colorado was the top for adults, with 62% of adults meeting their goal.

- **“Complete Streets” policies**: Only 27 states were found to have created state-level Complete Streets policies that ensure that streets are safe not only for motor vehicle users but also for pedestrians and bicyclists.

- **Walk/bike to school**: Most states (34) provide guidance on policies for school districts or schools on walking or biking to or from school.

- **Access to parks, community centers, and sidewalks**: Slightly more than half (55%) of the youth surveyed had a park, community center, or sidewalk in their neighborhood, with the District of Columbia having the highest percentage (76%) and Mississippi having the lowest (30%).

- **Child care regulations meeting federal guidelines**: No state reported that it had implemented child care regulations that met the federal guidelines of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity for preschoolers in all settings.

Stories from the Field
Three examples of initiatives in which states or cities are encouraging physical activity are also provided in the report. These include the Michigan Department of Community Health’s Complete Streets Initiative passed in 2010. This legislation requires that the needs of all legal users of roads, from riders of public transportation and motorists, to bicyclists and walkers, be considered when new roads are being designed. Also highlighted are the following: 1) Boston’s “Bike-to-Market Program,” which provides pro bono bike services in underserved areas with farmers’ markets, and 2) Minnesota’s hiring of an Active Transportation Coordinator to focus on finding ways to both encourage and increase the safety of children who walk to school. In large
part due to this initiative, Minnesota now has 181 schools that have implemented Safe Routes to School or walking-school-bus policies.

**For More Information**